World Chronicle

UNITED NATIONS

PROGRAMME: No. 772 recorded 13 December 1999

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ECOSOC

The Economic and Social Council, ECOSOC, was established by the United Nations Charter as the principal organ, under the authority of the General Assembly, to promote: (a) higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development; (b) solutions of international economic, social, health, and related cooperation; and c universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion. Is ECOSOC effective in dealing with all these major global issues? In this **World Chronicle** episode, Ambassador Francesco Paolo Fulci, President of the Economic and Social Council, and Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations, discusses his tenure as President of ECOSOC.

WORLD CHRONICLE is produced by the Media Division, Department of Public Information, United Nations, New York, NY 10017, U.S.A.

Duration: 28:01"
Executive Producer: Chaim Litewski
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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues.

Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

It has been said that 1999 is going to be remembered as "the year of the United Nations' Economic and Social Council renaissance".

Our guest today is the President of the Economic and Social Council, ECOSOC, and Permanent Representative of Italy to the UN, Ambassador Francesco Paolo Fulci. Ambassador Fulci has stated his determination to see a renewed ECOSOC as "the primary UN body to deal with economic and social issues of the family of nations and peoples". The impact of globalization, eradication of poverty, and the development of Africa are some of the challenges the Council faces. As Ambassador Fulci prepares to leave the presidency of the Council, has ECOSOC really been through a renaissance?

Joining me to talk with Ambassador Fulci are Linda Fasulo of *NBC News* and Afsane Bassir Pour of *Le Monde*.

Ambassador Fulci, welcome to **World Chronicle**.

Mr. President, as we've just noted, you set out to raise the profile of ECOSOC. Do you feel you've succeeded?

FULCI: Well, we've tried at least to save ECOSOC from extinction because two years ago when I first was elected Vice-President of ECOSOC, this seemed to be the destiny of the Organ – extinction.

LITTLEJOHNS: Why?

FULCI: First of all, they had confiscated our own chamber. We could not any longer meet in the chamber of the Economic and Social Council. We were being sent to the basement all the time for our meetings. The reason given was that there was not enough space for the observers but they kept saying that the Swedish did make a sort of architectural jewel there and there is space for the 54 Member States and the observers can be accommodated just on the other benches. They would say no way; there is no space. So the first thing we had to do was to get back our chamber.

LITTLEJOHNS: So there was no space because they accorded such a low priority to ECOSOC, was that it?

FULCI: No, because since it has been agreed that Member States – like it

happens in the Security Council where Member States have reserved seats for each of them, the same should happen for ECOSOC. But since in ECOSOC there was not enough space for this observer space -- they are there to observe what the 54 members of the Security Council were doing -- then they say that we could not meet there. We had to go to another room and they would send us, I repeat, down to the basement. And the simple answer to that was to build three extra rows of benches. But all sorts of difficulties were opposed to me for doing that. But I persisted and in the end, with the help of the Italian Government, we realized the three rows of benches. So now the room looks like a sort of Roman amphitheatre and not only that but now it is to us that they have to ask permission if they want to use our own room and not vice versa.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador Fulci, do you feel that ECOSOC is somehow in competition with other organs in the system that are involved with economic questions? I'm thinking of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and, more recently, the World Trade Organization which has had a few problems, to say the least. Where does ECOSOC fit into this picture?

FULCI: I think that it fits perfectly. There had been talks about the need to create a new Security Council for economic and social problems and I objected to that immediately. I said that body already exists and that is ECOSOC. What ECOSOC does in the end is to coordinate on the paper -- this is very important -- to coordinate 70 percent of the human and financial resources of the UN system. So you can imagine what a tremendous job this is, I repeat on paper, because in fact, my perception was what happened to ECOSOC happened was what used to happen to kings during the Middle Ages that all the barons, the counts and the princes that were appointed by the king, outstripped the king of his own prerogatives. So what we had to do is to curb all these princes and barons so that there is nobody else and the agencies, and the programme, and the bodies, that are on paper, depend on ECOSOC.

BASSIR POUR: Now in an ideal world what would be the role of ECOSOC because as Michael mentioned, you not only have the Bretton Woods institutions you also have the G-8 or the G7 -- the seven industrialized nations who deal with the economic matters. In an ideal world what do you think ECOSOC's role should be in the world?

FULCI: In my opinion, all one has to do is to look at the Charter and Article 55 says very clearly what the ECOSOC should be doing. "And the Economic and Social Council

may make or initiate studies and reports with respect to international economic, social, cultural, educational, health and related matters; may make recommendation on such matters to the General Assembly or to the Members of the United Nations or to the specialized agencies. It may make recommendation for the purposes of promoting respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental liberty" – which is so important. " It may call, in accordance with the rules, international conferences on matters falling within its conference". I mean, it can do a lot.

BASSIR POUR: But where are its teeth? Security Council does the veto power and we'll come to that, but imagine that you may call all these reports and all these recommendations, how can you enforce them?

FULCI: Well, I repeat – just to give you an idea – one thing that we did this year was for the very first time to apply Article 65 of the Charter. Article 65 says that if the Security Councils request the Council to draft some plan or to do something for the economic and social recovery of a country, it may do so. But it had never been applied. It was a dormant provision. What we did was we woke it up. And people say, how can a body of 54 guys agree on a rehabilitation plan such as for Haiti, which was the case. And the answer was, that we selected five goodwill ambassadors who practically rolled up their sleeves and started working very hard and in six weeks' time they were able to produce such a plan, which after that, went back to the Security Council and to the General Assembly. The General Assembly is going to approve it briefly and then we shall be overviewing its implementation – the ECOSOC.

FASULO: Ambassador Fulci, what other accomplishments – I mean what do you see as say the top two or three accomplishments of ECOSOC over the past year?

FULCI: Well the other, I believe, very important accomplishment is the fact that the international financial institutions, the so-called Bretton Woods institutions which are based in Washington – the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank – they, for the very first time, came en masse to the ECOSOC. The entire Board of Directors of both institutions walked into our chambers and we had a dialogue and the ECOSOC went to Washington. And this had never happened before. Before, there was a sort of wall of mutual suspicion and everybody was extremely jealous of its prerogatives and then all of a sudden they realize, probably, that it would give them a certain political legitimacy if they came over and explained to us what they were doing. And also, it would take away from them the

accusation of lack of transparency. The fact that they agreed to expose themselves to all the question of the 54 Member States of ECOSOC helped open new ground. We could understand much better how and why some countries were helped and some were not. We could understand why, on this question of the debt relief, they are asking some precise conditions and what are these conditions and we could give our advice. When I say we, I mean the member states of the ECOSOC saying if these conditions were too harsh or too mild or making other suggestions. In other words, a working relationship that nobody, but nobody ever dreamed about until last year.

BASSIR POUR: Ambassador, let's hope that you will be remembered for the results of ECOSOC, but you're already remembered for having blocked the ambitions of Germany and Japan as permanent members of the Security Council. Before you arrived at the UN, they seemed to be well on the way of getting a permanent seat but you blocked that. And there was a joke going around that you said that Italy lost the war, too, why shouldn't Italy get a permanent seat. Is that true?

LITTLEJOHNS: Did you ever really say that?

FULCI: Let me say that frankly the thing went this way. To set the stage, the two colleagues rose and said, "here we are, two global powers, ready to assume our new responsibilities as permanent members". And my first reaction inside me was, "But who needs more permanent members? Five are enough if not more than enough". So I immediately said, "But on what ground? If it is on the grounds that you lost the war, Italy also lost the war".

BASSIR POUR: So it's true. You did say that.

LITTLEJOHNS: What about countries that are not global powers but also have aspirations for permanent or semi-permanent membership of the Security Council? I'm thinking of Brazil, South Africa, Nigeria – I'm sure there are several others.

FASULO: India.

LITTLEJOHNS: India, of course. How could I forget? India. Have they been angry with you for blocking these changes in the Security Council?

FULCI: Well, at times yes, at times no because at times I was seen as their life. For instance when they had decided that they – the two from the Western world – should be the fixed permanent members while the others would be the rotating permanent members. Now, I mean to say how can this be? If they rotate, then Germany and Japan must also

rotate. Needless to say, Germany should rotate with us and with Canada and with Spain and Japan should rotate with South Korea and with some other big country from Asia. So at times we were friends on this, at times no. I was seen as quote unquote the obstructionist. And I must say that frankly I don't think that a reform will simply consist in raising or enhancing the international status of two or five power would help in anyway, the United Nations. And if you think in Orwell terms of the factory of the animals I don't see why. W already have five who are more equal than us why should the five become seven or ten? Is there any real good reason for that?

LITTLEJOHNS: This is **World Chronicle**. Our guest is Ambassador Francesco Paolo Fulci, President of the Economic and Social Council.

FASULO: Ambassador, but following up on the Security Council reform where do things stand? Do you think in all our lifetimes we'll see an enlarged Security Council? Have things been so blocked?

FULCI: I must confess that if countries had been more modest there could have been an increase in the non-permanent elected seats like it happened in 1963 when the elected members were increased from six to ten. And I think that would be only right because the Security Council must be more representative of the entire membership. When they became 15, the Member States were only 112. Nowadays, we are 188. So it is only right that there is an enlargement. But when we say that the Security Council must be more representative of the membership it must be in a democratic way not certainly adding to the current oligarchy. That would not help at all.

BASSIR POUR: Ambassador, do you think that the five permanent members, in spite of what they say publicly, are in fact quite happy with the status quo in the Security Council and were on your side in spite, as I said, of their public declarations?

FULCI: You know Machiavelli used to say if you have a powerful friend beware and not to make him even more powerful than he is because one day you might regret it. So I imagine that might be also the philosophy of the Big Five. They certainly are what the Romans would say *beati posidentes* – those who really have the special power. And like the *beati posidentes*, in reality they don't want to share with anybody else.

LITTLEJOHNS: So they're really quite happy with the way things stand?

FULCI: That's the way I feel. I mean, you should ask them.

BASSIR POUR: Publicly they say that they think that the Council should be

reformed but I think in fact they did not do anything to help you along. To help rather those who do want to reform in the Council.

FULCI: I'll repeat, for the time being the best possibility to increase the representation of the Council would be the so-called fall back position of the NAM movement. The NAM movement have said .....

LITTLEJOHNS: Non-Aligned Movement.

FULCI: Yes, the Non-Aligned Movement. They have said for the time being, while we continue to discuss the increase in permanent members, why don't we start with the immediate increase in non-permanent members which already would diminish the present gap between the Big Five and the rest.

FASULO: Ambassador, turning a little bit to Italy and Italy's perceptions of the UN, number one, has Italy given up the idea of getting a seat on the Council any time soon? And secondly, what is the perception of the United Nations in Italy?

FULCI: Linda, I must tell you that we never had any intention of getting a permanent seat in the Council unless the others got it. We keep saying that we want a more democratic Security Council and we don't make the Council more democratic if we add more permanent members. On the contrary, we increase the gap between democracy and the existing oligarchy. So for the first question, my answer is, definitely we have never expected to become permanent members but we don't want others to become permanent members either. As to the second question, the United Nations is the most popular institution in my country. I would tell you Italy has changed after the war as many as forty or fifty governments but one main pillar of the Italian foreign policy has never changed and that is strong support to the United Nations as such.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador Fulci, apart from the popularity of the United Nations among the Italian people, may I ask you as the Ambassador of Italy shortly to be leaving how you appraise the UN at this time, heading into a new millennium? Do you feel that the UN is going to become more important on the international scene, is going to be more useful than it's been in the last few years when – although Italy may be happy with it – some other countries, notably the United States or at least elements of the United States, are not that crazy about it. What's your feeling?

FULCI: Very much depends from the United States and especially the United States Congress. I have never forgotten the lesson after World War I.

LITTLEJOHNS: World War I?

FULCI: World War I. Remember at that time President Wilson had devised the League of Nations as a way of preserving peace and security in the world but, unfortunately, the American Senate turned immediately isolationist and they not only rejected Wilson's plans, they abandoned the League of Nations and they withdrew the troops from Europe. The result of this was the miscalculation by Hitler, Mussolini and the Japanese. They thought that since America had lost interest Americans would not intervene in any war and they could swallow Europe and a good part of Asia. Luckily, Roosevelt, *in extremis*, persuaded Congress to break from this isolationism and after World War II the mistake was not repeated. The Americans not only embraced the Wilson idea but they insisted on having the United Nations on their territory. They kept the American soldiers in Europe and only because of this, peace was preserved for 30 years – for 50 years – and in the end NATO, the West, could win World War III without firing one single shot because of that wise decision that had been made by Roosevelt. I think history will demonstrate what an enormous, enormous service Roosevelt extended to the entire humanity. Now what I'm worried – I'm extremely worried when I hear that almost half of the American Congress boasts that they don't have a passport and they don't need one and they continue to believe that they can live in isolation. They seem to forget that because of this attitude the world plunged from World War I into World War II only after 20 years.

BASSIR POUR: Ambassador, I want to change the subject. You were presiding over the Security Council at the end of 1996 when there were elections for the Secretary-General and Secretary-General Kofi Annan won those elections. Now you were in it from the inside. It seems to me that this process of election is very arbitrary. There aren't any rules and there isn't a commission, there isn't a committee to elect the Secretary-General. Do you think this should be changed and what do you think of the geographical rotation that although not written on the Charter exists *de facto*?

FULCI: Well, first on the second question. I think that it is only right that as the geographic rotation in all of the other bodies of the United Nations – in the presidency of the General Assembly or in the presidency of ECOSOC or in general in all the committees of the General Assembly equally, there should be geographic rotation for the Secretary-General post so that those regions who have had it more often than the others should renounce it. And I'm specially thinking to the Western group. The Western group already had for three

times the post of Secretary-General and I don't see how possibly they could pretend to have it again. Before then, they say at least another term for the Asians, another term for the Latin Americans and possibly another one for the Africans before the European can pretend to ...

BASSIR POUR: Don't you think the job should be given to the best person in the world? That's why I spoke of a search committee.

FULCI: Yes, but also the other job should be given to the best person in the world but also the best person can be found in the right geographical grouping. It is not necessarily the best thing absolutely.

BASSIR POUR: So you see nothing wrong with this process of election?

FULCI: No. I think actually it's right because every group, every geographic group is entitled to be represented once in a while in what is the top executive job of the United Nations.

BASSIR POUR: So you're ruling out a term for Kofi Annan because Africa would have had two already?

LITTLEJOHNS: You mean a second term?

BASSIR POUR: A second term.

FULCI: Well, there again, not necessarily. Because first of all, Kofi Annan is from the Africa south of the Sahara while Boutrous Ghali was from Africa north of the Sahara. There are two other parts as we all know. But apart from this, it can very well be that it is decided that he should have another go but then the one after him should be either from Asia or from Latin America because they have been less than the others while I repeat the Western European group had the two Scandinavians and then the Austrian. So three times and three times is quite enough in my opinion.

FASULO: Ambassador, the hour is late here, would you have any – can you share with us what unfinished business you have?

FULCI: Yes. One thing that I'm still fighting at this last hours of my stay in New York is that I want very much that my colleagues of ECOSOC decide to create an ad hoc task force of five goodwill ambassadors again who should deal with this problem of strengthening the coordination of ECOSOC with these committees and bodies and I believe that we should take the decision now and mandate the next president at the first meeting of ECOSOC to install these wise men/task force that should prepare a plan on how the ECOSOC could aggressively get back its coordination role. And, of course, the decision should be

made then by ECOSOC itself that has its major session, as we all know, during the month of July alternatively in Geneva or in New York. For next year, it could be here in New York. My great hope is that we shall be able to have this task force and that they will produce an impeccable plan and that ECOSOC will get back all its confidence and all its coordination functions.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador Fulci, alas we've come to the end of our business, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**. Our guest has been Ambassador Francesco Paolo Fulci, President of the Economic and Social Council. He was interviewed by Linda Fasulo of *NBC News* and Afsane Bassir Pour of *Le Monde*.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of World Chronicle.

ANNOUNCER: Transcripts of the programme may be obtained free of charge by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to **World Chronicle**, United Nations, Room S-827L, New York, N.Y., 10017.

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